



August 4, 2020

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We write to commend your commitment to expanding broadband connectivity for the millions of Americans stuck behind the digital divide and respectfully encourage you to deliver on that commitment by supporting adequate funding to close the broadband gap in unserved and underserved communities in the next COVID-19 relief package.

There are at least 18.3 million Americans who lack access to internet at true broadband speeds, according to the latest data from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). A recent study from BroadbandNow found as many as 42 million Americans lack broadband access. The FCC defines true broadband as 25 Mbps/second download and 3 Mbps/second upload speeds.

For the millions of Americans who lack access to a broadband connection, the pandemic has exacerbated the many challenges associated with the digital divide. Students without broadband at home can be denied access to the full potential of remote learning, patients may be unable to access telehealth solutions that can keep them healthy and allow them to avoid strained facilities, farmers and ranchers can be placed at a competitive disadvantage in a global market, small businesses can face steep hurdles to adapting their business to reach and serve customers remotely and workers can struggle to telework. These Americans, in both rural and urban communities, cannot wait five years for access to broadband internet.

Connect Americans Now (CAN) is a coalition of organizations and companies representing voices for agriculture, health care, education, small business, technology, veterans, rural advocacy and more — committed to completely and swiftly eliminating the digital divide in rural America by supporting a mixed-technology approach that leverages the full potential of every tool in the nation's toolkit.

As Congress continues to address the COVID-19 pandemic, CAN and the 46 organizations co-signed on this letter ask you to provide urgently needed funding to rapidly and cost effectively expand broadband access.

The dedication of adequate resources to completely eliminate the digital divide, guided by key principles, is of the utmost urgency for the wellbeing and prosperity of millions of Americans.



Resources should be focused on rapid service deployments so long as there are clear requirements that service meet at least the FCC-defined speed for broadband.

New broadband funding should also be targeted to meet a particular need. With many schools functioning partially or completely remote this fall, delivering broadband access to students – especially in underserved rural areas – will be crucial to keeping this population of students on track. With health care systems remaining strained by the pandemic, the expansion of access to telehealth will be critical to keeping Americans healthy and securing systems that are vulnerable to strain. Anchor institutions, such as schools, libraries, healthcare providers and other community organizations need high-capacity broadband to provide essential services to the public.

A competitive bidding process should be used to minimize cost when determining funding amounts.

Broadband funding should also be technology neutral. In a highly dynamic market, policymakers and regulators should refrain from determining technological winners and losers. Regulations should not be used to push the market toward one structure over another; instead, awards should prioritize the speed of deployment, the number of unserved Americans who can be reached and the cost effectiveness of the project.

Similarly, any program should minimize distortions to the existing marketplace.

Given the urgency to expand broadband connectivity, funding legislation should seek to minimize administrative burdens that involve red tape and pose burdensome obstacles to deployment and implementation. Programs should only impose requirements on recipients that are necessary to maintaining the program's integrity.

Congress must act to tackle this urgent problem and completely eliminate the digital divide in America by allocating resources for broadband deployments that will most rapidly and cost effectively bridge the broadband gap.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued dedication to eliminating the digital divide.

Sincerely,

Connect Americans Now

American Telemedicine Association
American Hemp Ventures
Association of Oregon Counties
Association of Oregon Faculties
BroadbandNow
Chehalem Valley (Oregon) Innovation Accelerator
Crawford County (Wisconsin) Communications Cooperative
College Possible
Connected Nation
Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)



CONNECT AMERICANS NOW

Corteva
Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation
Greater Grenada Area (Mississippi) Chamber of Commerce
Marias River (Montana) Livestock Association
Mississippi Hospitality & Restaurant Association
Montana Rural Education Association
National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry
National Rural Education Association
National Veteran Small Business Coalition
Nevada Farm Bureau Federation
North Clackamas (Oregon) Chamber of Commerce
Northern Wasco County (Oregon) PUD
Oregon Association of Nurseries
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
Oregon Economic Development Association
Oregon Farm Bureau Federation
Oregon Hop Growers Association
Oregon State Chamber of Commerce
Oregon State Grange
Oregon Water Resources Congress
Oregon Women for Agriculture
Purdue University Center for Regional Development
Schools, Health and Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB)
South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation
Student Veterans of America
Technology Association of Oregon
Teleco Systems
Telehealth Alliance of Oregon
Thomas County (Kansas) Economic Development Alliance
Tillamook Bay Community College
Washington State Farm Bureau Federation
Wisconsin Corn Growers Association
Wisconsin Independent Businesses
Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
Wisconsin Technology Council

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